

IMAGES--OLD AND NEW



RICHARD ALDINGTON

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IMAGES
OLD AND NEW

THE CONTEMPORARY SERIES

UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

LAODICE AND DANAË

By *Gordon Bottomley*

Play in Verse

IMAGES—OLD AND NEW

By *Richard Aldington*

Poems

THE ENGLISH TONGUE AND OTHER POEMS

By *Lewis Worthington Smith*

FIVE MEN AND POMPEY

By *Stephen Vincent Benét*

Dramatic Portraits

HORIZONS

By *Robert Alden Sanborn*

Poems

THE TRAGEDY

By *Gilbert Moyle*

A Fantasy in Verse

IMAGES

OLD AND NEW

BY

RICHARD ALDINGTON



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CONTENTS

TO A GREEK MARBLE	9
ARGYRIA	10
THE RIVER	11
NEW LOVE	12
"BEAUTY, THOU HAST HURT ME OVERMUCH"	13
STELE	14
OCTOBER	15
LESBIA	16
IN THE OLD GARDEN	17
JUNE RAIN	18
IN THE VIA SISTINA	19
CHORICOS	21
A GIRL	23
IMAGES	24
HYELLA	26
THE FAUN SEES SNOW FOR THE FIRST TIME	27
AT MITYLENE	28
LEMURES	29
AMALFI	30
HERMES, LEADER OF THE DEAD	31
SUMMER	32
AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM	33
SCENTS	34
NIGHT PIECE	35
DAWN	36
AT NIGHTS	37
EVENING	39
CHURCH WALK, KENSINGTON	40

ST. MARY'S, KENSINGTON	41
IN THE TUBE	42
CINEMA EXIT	43
INTERLUDE	44
A NEW HOUSE	45
HAMPSTEAD HEATH	46
LONDON	47

NOTE

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**IMAGES
OLD AND NEW**

TO A GREEK MARBLE

Πότνια, πότνια,
White grave goddess,
Pity my sadness,
O silence of Paros.

I am not of these about thy feet,
These garments and decorum;
I am thy brother,
Thy lover of aforetime crying to thee,
And thou hearest me not.

I have whispered thee in thy solitudes
Of our loves in Phrygia,
The far ecstasy of burning noons
When the fragile pipes
Ceased in the cypress shade,
And the brown fingers of the shepherd
Moved over slim shoulders;
And only the cicada sang.

I have told thee of the hills
And the lisp of reeds
And the sun upon thy breasts,

And thou hearest me not,
Πότνια, πότνια,
Thou hearest me not.

ARGYRIA

O you,
O you most fair,
Swayer of reeds, whisperer
Among the flowering rushes,
You have hidden away your hands
Beneath the poplar leaves;
You have given them to the white waters.

Swallow-fleet,
Sea-child cold from waves;
Slight reed that sang so blithely in the wind;
White cloud the white sun kissed into the air;
Pan mourns for you.

White limbs, white song,
Pan mourns for you.

THE RIVER

I

I have drifted along the river
Until I moored my boat
By these crossed trunks.

Here the mist moves
Over fragile leaves and rushes,
Colourless waters and brown fading hills.

You have come from beneath the trees
And move within the mist,
A floating leaf.

II

O blue flower of the evening,
You have touched my face
With your leaves of silver.

Love me, for I must depart.

NEW LOVE

She has new leaves
After her dead flowers,
Like the little almond tree
Which the frost hurt.

“BEAUTY, THOU HAST HURT ME
OVERMUCH”

The light is a wound to me.
The soft notes
Feed upon the wound.

Where wert thou born
O thou woe
That consumest my life?
Whither comest thou?

Toothed wind of the seas,
No man knows thy beginning.
As a bird with strong claws
Thou woundest me,
O beautiful sorrow.

STELE

Pan, O Pan,
The oread weeps in the stony olive-garden
On the hill side.

There bloom the fragile
Blue-purple wind-flowers,
There the wild fragrant narcissus
Bends by the grey stones.

But Pan, O Pan,
The oread weeps in the stony olive-garden;
She heeds not the moss-coloured lizards
And crocus-yellow butterflies.

For her reed pipe
That was the crying of the wind,
Her pipe that was the singing
Wind of the mountain,
Her pipe is broken.

Pan, O Pan,
As you rush from the peaks
With the wood-girls and flower-girls
And the shouting fauns,
Unawares you have broken her little reed
With your stamping hoofs.

And she weeps in the olive-garden.

OCTOBER

The beech-leaves are silver
For lack of the tree's blood ;
At your kiss my lips
Became like the silver beech-leaves.

LESBIA

Grow weary if you will, let me be sad.
Use no more speech now;
Let the silence spread gold hair above us,
Fold on delicate fold.
Use no more speech;
You had the ivory of my life to carve

And Picus of Mirandola is dead;
And all the gods they dreamed and fabled of,
Hermes and Thoth and Christ are rotten now,
Rotten and dank . . .

And through it all I see your pale Greek face;
Tenderness
Makes me as eager as a little child to love you,
You morsel left half cold on Caesar's plate.

IN THE OLD GARDEN

I have sat here happy in the gardens,
Watching the still pool and the reeds
And the dark clouds
Which the wind of the upper air
Tore like the green leafy boughs
Of the divers-hued trees of late summer;
But though I greatly delight
In these and the water-lilies,
That which sets me nighest to weeping
Is the rose and white colour of the smooth flag-stones,
And the pale yellow grasses
Among them.

JUNE RAIN

Hot, a griffin's mouth of flame,
The sun rasped with his golden tongue
The city streets, till men and walls shrivelled;
The dusty air stagnated.

At the third noon a wind rippled,
A wide sea silently breaking;
A thick veil of rain-drops
Hid the sun and the hard blue.

A grey garment of rain,
Cold as hoar frost in April,
Enwrapped us.

IN THE VIA SISTINA

O daughter of Isis,
Thou standest beside the wet highway
Of this decayed Rome,
A manifest harlot.

Straight and slim art thou
As a marble phallus;
Thy face is the face of Isis
Carven
As she is carven in basalt.
And my heart stops with awe
At the presence of gods,
For there beside thee on the stall of images
Is the head of Osiris
Thy lord.

CHORICOS

The ancient songs
Pass deathward mournfully.

Cold lips that sing no more, and withered wreaths,
Regretful eyes, and drooping breasts and wings—
Symbols of ancient songs,
Mournfully passing
Down to the great white surges,
Watched of none
Save the frail sea-birds
And the lithe pale girls,
Daughters of Okeanos.

And the songs pass. From the green land
Which lies upon the waves as a leaf
On the flowers of hyacinth;
And they pass from the waters,
The manifold winds and the dim moon,
And they come,
Silently winging through soft Kimmerian dusk,
To the quiet level lands
That she keeps for us all,
That she wrought for us all for sleep
In the silver days of the earth's dawning—
Proserpina, daughter of Zeus.

And we turn from the Kyprian's breasts,
And we turn from thee,

Phoibos Apollon,
And we turn from the music of old,
And the hills that we loved and the meads,
And we turn from the fiery day,
And the lips that were over-sweet ;
For silently
Brushing the fields with red-shod feet,
With purple robe
Searing the grass as with a sudden flame,
Death,
Thou hast come upon us.

And of all the ancient songs
Passing to the swallow-blue halls
By the dark streams of Persephone,
This only remains—
That in the end we turn to thee,
Death,
We turn to thee, singing
One last song.

O Death,
Thou art an healing wind
That blowest over white flowers
A-tremble with dew ;
Thou art a wind flowing
Over far leagues of lonely sea ;
Thou art the dusk and the fragrance ;
Thou art the lips of love mournfully smiling ;
Thou art the sad peace of one

Satiate with old desires ;
Thou art the silence of beauty,
And we look no more for the morning
We yearn no more for the sun
Since with thy white hands,
Death,
Thou crownest us with the pallid chaplets,
The slim colourless poppies
Which in thy garden alone
Softly thou gatherest.

And silently ;
And with slow feet approaching ;
And with bowed head and unlit eyes,
We kneel before thee :
And thou, leaning toward us,
Caressingly layest upon us
Flowers from thy thin cold hands,
And, smiling as a chaste woman
Knowing love in her heart,
Thou seelest our eyes
And the illimitable quietude
Comes gently upon us.

A GIRL

You were that clear Sicilian fluting
That pains our thought even now.

You were the notes
Of cold fantastic grief
Some few found beautiful.

IMAGES

I

Like a gondola of green scented fruits
Drifting along the dank canals of Venice,
You, O exquisite one,
Have entered into my desolate city.

II

The blue smoke leaps
Like swirling clouds of birds vanishing.
So my love leaps forth toward you,
Vanishes and is renewed.

III

A rose-yellow moon in a pale sky
When the sunset is faint vermillion
In the mist among the tree-boughs
Art thou to me, my beloved.

IV

A young beech tree on the edge of the forest
Stands still in the evening,
Yet shudders through all its leaves in the light air
And seems to fear the stars—
So are you still and so tremble.

V

The red deer are high on the mountain,
They are beyond the last pine-trees.
And my desires have run with them.

VI

The flower which the wind has shaken
Is soon filled again with rain ;
So does my heart fill slowly with tears,
O Foam-Driver, Wind-of-the-Vineyards,
Until you return.

HYELLA

(From "Acon," written in Latin in the sixteenth century by the Italian, Giovanni-Battista Amalteo.)

See the maiden, the maiden is dying;
And now the glory withers from her rose-red face.

As a dark blue hyacinth flower
In a secret valley,
Fed by the earth our mother,
Received in her breast,
Drawn up by her with dew and happy winds—
If once the heat of heaven or bitter Auster
Fall upon it, straightway,
Spoiled of the joyful pride of beauty,
It droops and dies upon the parched grasses.

Unwonted griefs are in the meadows
And the hay-swathes are rotting;
Christ-thorns grow for violets and the bright lilies
Wither on the drooping stem;
No berries colour the lush river-bank;
Neither grass nor leaf springs in meadow and wood.

THE FAUN SEES SNOW FOR THE FIRST TIME

Zeus,
Brazen-thunder-hurler,
Cloud-whirler, son-of-Kronos,
Send vengeance on these Oreads
Who strew
White frozen flecks of mist and cloud
Over the brown trees and the tufted grass
Of the meadows, where the stream
Runs black through shining banks
Of bluish white.

Zeus,
Are the halls of heaven broken up
That you flake down upon me
Feather-strips of marble?

Dis and Styx!
When I stamp my hoof
The frozen-cloud-specks jam into the cleft
So that I reel upon two slippery points. . . .

Fool, to stand here cursing
When I might be running!

AT MITYLENE

O Artemis,
Will you not leave the dark fastness
And set your steel-white foot upon the foam,
And come across the rustling sand
Setting it a-drift with the wind of your raiment.

• For these women have laid out a purple cloth,
And they have builded you an altar
Of white shells for the honey.
They have taken the sea grass for garlands
And cleansed their lips with the sea.

O Artemis,
Girdle the gold about you,
Set the silver upon your hair
And remember us—
We, who have grown weary even of music,
We, who would scream behind the wild dogs of
Scythia.

LEMURES

In Nineveh
And beyond Nineveh
In the dusk
They were afraid.

In Thebes of Egypt
In the dusk
They chanted of them to the dead.

In my Lesbos and Achaia
Where the God dwelt
We knew them.

Now men say "They are not";
But in the dusk
Ere the white sun comes—
A gay child that bears a white candle,—
I am afraid of their rustling,
Of their terrible silence,
The menace of their secrecy.

AMALFI

We will come down to you,
O very deep sea,
And drift upon your pale green waves
Like scattered petals.

We will come down to you from the hills,
From the scented lemon-groves,
From the hot sun.
We will come down,
O Thalassa,
And drift upon
Your pale green waves
Like petals.

HERMES, LEADER OF THE DEAD

We, who loved thy lyre,
Yet knew the end of all songs
A lamentation and a mourning;
We, who loved Eos—
That maiden whiter than Narcissus—
And loved the midday heat, the sea-winds
Rustling across the vineyards;
Now in the twilight
Hold forth trembling hands
To thee, Hermes,
Leader of the Dead.

Bear us upon thy winged flight
Down the dark blue ways unto Orcus;
Make us stabile
With thy imperishable hands,
For our feet stumble, and age
Loosens our knees;
Our wearied eyes
Yearn for the heavy bowed gold blossoms
Beneath the very grey sky
Of Persephone.

SUMMER

A butterfly,
Black and scarlet,
Spotted with white,
Fans its wings
Over a privet flower.

A thousand crimson foxgloves,
Tall bloody pikes,
Stand motionless in the gravel quarry;
The wind runs over them.

A rose film over a pale sky
Fantastically cut by dark chimneys;
Candles winking in the windows
Across an old city-garden.

AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM

I turn the page and read :

"I dream of silent verses where the rhyme
Glides noiseless as an oar."

The heavy musty air, the black desks,
The bent heads and the rustling noises
In the great dome
Vanish. . . .

And

The sun hangs in the cobalt-blue sky,
The boat drifts over the lake shallows,
The fishes skim like umber shades through the
 undulating weeds,
The oleanders drop their rosy petals on the lawns,
And the swallows dive and swirl and whistle
About the cleft battlements of Can Grande's castle . . .

SCENTS

(White Jonquils)

Old cloisters where a hollow fountain drips
And the brown church walls
Are soft with winter sun.

And the moist garden mould in March
After the wind.

(Yellow Jonquils)

The moon
Low down the hills Sorrento sees about her—
The orange orchards sweet in May.

Again the soft wet earth
In English gardens
When the rain and wind have passed.

NIGHT PIECE

I lie awake and listen.

The water drips musically in the large zinc tank; the little watch beside me ticks away the seconds of my life; at long intervals the bell of St. Mary Abbot's growls out huskily the quarters: ding ding, *dang*, dong!

Silence. The water drips slower and more musically; the watch ticks more gently; the window-curtain rustles a little in the wind and a faint confused glow of moonlight slips into the room.

Silence. I rise and draw the curtain. The white misty moonlight chequers the houses into blocks and lines and angles of watery silverish white and intense black shadows. There is no movement, no sound in the city.

No sound? A train whistle blows very faint and shrill and clear and far away—clearer than bugles and as shrill as a night bird. A train is running out from Marylebone or Victoria...

Very faint and shrill and far away the whistle sounds—more like a wild bird than ever. And all my unsatisfied desires and empty wishes and vague yearnings are set aching by the thin tremulous whistle—the post-horn of the coach of Romance.

DAWN

It is night ; and silent.

The mist is still beside the frozen dykes ; it lies on the stiff grass, about the poplar trunks. The last star goes out.

The gulls are coming up from the sea, crying, and drifting across like pieces of mist, like fragments of white cloth. They turn their heads and peer as they pass. The sky low down glows deep purple.

The plovers swirl and dart over the ploughed field beyond ; their screams are sorrowful and sharp. The purple drifts up the pale sky and grows redder. The mist stirs.

The brass on the harness of the plough-horses jingles as they come into the field. The birds rise in scattered knots. The mist trembles, grows thinner, rises. The red and gold sky shines dully on the ice.

The men shout across the thawing clods ; the ploughs creak ; the horses steam in the cold ; the plovers and gulls have gone ; the sparrows twitter.

The sky is gold and blue, very faint and damp.

It is day.

AT NIGHTS

At nights I sit here,
Shading my eyes, shutting them if you glance up,
Pretending to doze,
And watching you,
Thinking . . .

I think of when I first saw the beauty of things—
God knows I was poor enough and sad enough
And humiliated enough—
But not all the slights and the poorness and the worry
Could hide away the green of the poplar leaves,
The ripples and light of the little stream,
The patterns of the ducks' feathers—
Like a Japanese print—
The dawns I saw in the winter
When I went shooting,
The summer walks and the winter walks,
The hot days with the cows coming down to the water,
The flowers,
Buttercups, meadowsweet, hog's parsley,
And the larks singing in the morning
And the thrushes singing at evening
When I went out into the fields, muttering poetry . . .

I looked at the world as God did
When first He made it.
I saw that it was good.

And now at nights,
Now that everything has gone right somehow,
And I have friends and books
And no more bitterness,
I sit here, shading my eyes,
Peeping at you, watching you,
Thinking.

EVENING

The chimneys, rank on rank,
Cut the clear sky;
The moon,
With a rag of gauze about her loins
Poses among them, an awkward Venus—

And here am I looking wantonly at her
Over the kitchen sink.

CHURCH WALK, KENSINGTON

(Sunday Morning)

The cripples are going to church.
Their crutches beat upon the stones,
And they have clumsy iron boots.

Their clothes are black, their faces peaked and mean;
Their legs are withered
Like dried bean pods.

Their eyes are as stupid as frogs'.

And the god, September,
Has paused for a moment here
Garlanded with crimson leaves.
He held a branch of fruited oak.
He smiled like Hermes the beautiful
Cut in marble.

ST. MARY'S, KENSINGTON

The orange plane-leaves
Rest gently on the cracked grey slabs
In the city churchyard.

O pitiful dead,
There is not one of those who pass by
To remember you.

But the trees do not forget;
Their severed tresses
Are laid sadly above you.

IN THE TUBE

The electric car jerks ;
I stumble on the slats of the floor,
Fall into a leather seat
And look up.

A row of advertisements,
A row of windows,
Set in brown woodwork pitted with brass nails,
A row of hard faces,
Immobile,
In the swaying train,
Rush across the flickering background of fluted dingy
tunnel;
A row of eyes,
Eyes of greed, of pitiful blankness, of plethoric com-
placency,
Immobile,
Gaze, stare at one point,
At my eyes.

Antagonism,
Disgust,
Immediate antipathy,
Cut my brain, as a dry sharp reed
Cuts a finger.

I surprise the same thought
In the brasslike eyes :

"What right have you to live."

CINEMA EXIT

After the click and whirr
Of the glimmering pictures,
The dry feeling in the eyes
As the sight follows the electric flickerings,
The banal sentimentality of the films,
The hushed concentration of the people,
The tinkling piano—
Suddenly,
A vast avalanch of greenish yellow light
Pours over the threshold;
White globes 'darting vertical rays spot the sombre
 buildings;
The violent gloom of the night
Battles with the radiance;
Swift figures, legs, skirts, white cheeks, hats
Flicker in oblique rays of dark and light.

Millions of human vermin
Swarm sweating
Along the night-arched cavernous roads.

(Happily rapid chemical processes
Will disintegrate them all.)

INTERLUDE

Blow your tin squeals
On your reedy whistle.

How they come
dancing,

White girls,
lithe girls,

In linked dance
From Attica.

Gay girls dancing
in the frozen street,
Hair streaming, and white raiment

Flying,
Red lips that first were
Red in Ephesus.

Gone!

**You? Red-nose, piping by the Red Lion,
You!**

Did you bring them?

Here, take my pennies,
Mon semblable, mon frère!

A NEW HOUSE

Inside,
A smell of mortar,
Odours of plaster, sawn wood, damp,
Hang in the hollow cold rooms
And taint the breath in one's nostrils.

Outside,
Grey dirty scaffoldings tied with ropes,
Red walls crusted with scum,
Rise from the trampled soil
Among felled trees and naked flowers.

There is a silence, a truce ;
The old earth-gods retreat
Sullen, beaten and disconsolate ;
London has beaten them,
Swallowed, engulfed their territory,
Crushing their flowers into mud.

HAMPSTEAD HEATH

(Easter Monday, 1915)

Dark clouds, torn into gaps of livid sky,
Pierced through
By a swift searchlight, a long white dagger.

The black murmuring crowd
Flows, eddies, stops, flows on
Between the lights
And the banks of noisy booths.

LONDON

(May 1915)

Glittering leaves
Dance in a squall;
Behind them bleak immoveable clouds.

A church spire
Holds up a little brass cock
To peck at the blue wheat-fields.

Roofs, conical spires, tapering chimneys,
Livid with sunlight, lace the horizon.

A pear-tree, a broken white pyramid
In a dingy garden, troubles me
With ecstasy.

At night, the moon, a pregnant woman,
Walks cautiously over the slippery heavens.

And I am tormented,
Obsessed,
Among all this beauty,
With a vision of ruins,
Of walls crumbling into clay.

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254



